

## New PR Director a familiar face to AFRL

*by 2nd Lt. J. Elaine Hunnicutt, AFRL Public Affairs*

WRIGHT-PATTERSON AIR FORCE BASE, Ohio — Col. Michael Heil returns to the ‘Lab’ after a six-year absence and will take over as director of the Propulsion Directorate in May.

The colonel didn’t have to move far, as he descended the hill from the Air Force Institute of Technology where he served as the commandant for about two years.

Heil was involved in the formation of AFRL in 1997 as the Air Force Phillips Laboratory commander, and is pleased with the way things are shaping up.

While here, Heil hopes to enhance technical contributions and improve connectivity to the warfighters, academia and industry.

“My enthusiasm is increased seeing the fruits of our labor, the technology created by AFRL and its processors, being used today,” Heil said. “That technology is not only helping our military win this war, but is minimizing the loss of innocent life.”

Company Grade Officers should know that Heil carries with him a unique perspective and understanding about their role in the mission after serving as the commander of a laboratory (Phillips), test center (Arnold) and school (AFIT).

“I want the young scientists and engineers to understand the relevance of what they are doing. Often we lose sight of the impact because we are far removed from the battlefield and the fact that our work sometimes takes years, even decades, to see its impact on the Air Force mission. The challenge we face is to constantly reinforce the importance of every individual’s job and the mission of AFRL,” he said.

“We were born of technology, it is our culture and we must embrace it; our sister services associate the Air Force as being the high-tech branch of service,” Heil said.

“We work in the greatest organization in the world. This is the world’s best laboratory serving the world’s best Air Force,” Heil said.

The advice he offers to young officers is to strive for a command position during their careers. “Commanding a test center and Air Force Base (Arnold) was a highlight of my career. I served as the installation and center commander, and I was responsible for the 2,000 people, 40,000 acres and billions of dollars of infrastructure,” Heil said, calling the opportunity ‘unique for a non-rated officer’.

In 1974, as an Air Force Academy junior, Heil made his first trip to Wright-Patterson to work in a summer research program. He was originally a political science major, but a great teaching staff and experiences like this summer program swayed him towards engineering, and he has never regretted that decision. “That research program helped motivate me to pursue a technology oriented assignment and career,” Heil said.

@